

Reseña

DE MARCO, Miguel Ángel. (2022). Book: "Hidrovia, plataforma competitiva para el desarrollo. Del Siglo XIX al XXI" IDEHESI, 1055 pp.

The Paraná-Paraguay navigation route is one of the hottest topics in Argentina's contemporary politics. As a vital commercial corridor in the Southern Cone since the mid-nineteenth century, the Paraná-Paraguay "waterway" – whose length is over 3400 kilometers – has been posing key questions concerning commerce, national exports, international economy, maritime transportation, state politics and sovereignty, and new geopolitical transformations. With the tremendous goal to unpack and discuss these questions in detail, De Marco's book "Hidrovia, plataforma competitiva para el desarrollo. Del Siglo XIX al XXI" (IDEHESI, 2022, 1055 p.) accompanies the reader to a long journey through the history of Southern Cone's most important waterway, exploring its making and unmaking during the different political and economic epochs that have influenced and frequently determined its destiny. De Marco takes this ambitious challenge by deploying an extensive and diversified selection of sources. The book is an excellent container from which it is possible to reconstruct salient moments of the history of the Paraná-Paraguay commercial route by exploring the voices of the main economic, political, and legal actors, thus composing an eclectic concert of historical sources that, in turn, suggests the possibility of several investigative directions. Specifically, De Marco collected, systematized, and analyzed government documents, private and public data on Argentina's trade, legal documents, local and national newspapers, and institutional reports, also conducting more than 100 interviews with relevant actors in the region, as well as mobilizing a broad spectrum of local, regional, and international secondary sources. Such a methodological strategy makes the book an unprecedented collection of often unpublished sources on the topic, a fact that is further enriched by the construction of new maps that help combine and discuss the material that progressively emerges in the narration.

The book is divided into 13 chapters that delve into historical and contemporary aspects concerning the waterway. In Chapter 1, De Marco goes back to 1852, when the country's political turmoil resulted in a piece of legislation that allowed the city of Rosario to take advantage of its strategic geographical position and develop a critical port node around itself. Since then, despite the political and economic changes that have influenced the city's activities, Rosario has become the heart of the waterway and has reinforced its net of infrastructure, defining the waterway's internal geometries until today. Rather importantly, De Marco frames the chapter within the period of the First Globalization, shedding light on the radical connections between the transformations of the international economy and those occurred – or sometimes missed, depending on the different economic perspectives – in the Southern Cone. After summarizing the economic and political conditions that marked the epoch of the "first waterway", the author proceeds to Chapter 2 by telling the history of the waterway during the Second Globalization, describing Argentina's system of transportation after World War I, and providing a detailed account of the significant changes that took place in maritime transportation during that time. While reading this first part of the book, which works as a powerful historical introduction, some core themes appear in the discussion, themes that constitute key elements and issues that have been defining the question of the waterway during the past few decades, and that will sustain the rest of De Marco's narration. One of the essential topics in this sense certainly concerns the dredging of the waterway, an operation that is

constantly needed due to, on the one hand, the shallow waters and the uninterrupted sedimentation of soil particles and, on the other, the constant desire to further deepen the canals of navigation and thus increase the volume of commerce.

De Marco then continues discussing aspects of the Paraná-Paraguay waterway by approaching the end of the twentieth century. Chapter 3 delves into the important decades of the 1980s and 1990s, focusing not only on the political context in Argentina but also on the technological changes and challenges that end of the millennium posed to the waterway project. Chapter 4, in turn, offers a view from a regional context and discusses the most relevant actors involved in the development of the waterway, considering such a project a trigger of regional integration for the countries crossed by the rivers. The subsequent chapters explore the combination of institutional, legislative, and economic components that have marked the waterway over the past three decades, paying attention to debates and perspectives in support of private actors (Chapter 5), the action exerted by the state (Chapter 6), and mixed solutions that also included the public participation in the management of the waterway (Chapter 7). De Marco keeps shedding light on the burning discussions and episodes that have concerned the organization and promotion of the "great fluvial highway" (Chapter 8), producing a detailed exploration of the transformations of the dredging and beaconing system (Chapter 9 and 11) and reconstructing the role of critical regional actors such as Mercosur (Chapter 10). The last two chapters investigate current and future developments of the waterway, correlating them with recent geo-economic events such as the global economic crisis and the rise of China in the region (Chapter 12), finally proposing some reflections on what the role of the waterway could be in the region, and exploring a number of potential political and economic strategies for the future.

To sum up, the book provides a deep examination of a much-debated theme in today's Argentina such as the Paraná-Paraguay waterway – in a context in which the very definition of waterway is often at stake, along with its socio-material and environmental determinations. Most significantly, as the book suggests, the waterway's history needs to be necessarily understood in connection with global history, carefully considering the convoluted combination of local, national, regional, and international actors that have contributed to its continuous transformation. It is precisely this rich and complex piece of history, including the inevitable controversies and contradictions, that De Marco's meticulous narration of the Paraná-Paraguay waterway aims to illuminate. And this latter aspect makes the book an inspirational reading not only for scholars and students interested in Argentine history, national development, and infrastructure studies, but it also directly speaks to those engaged with themes concerning geopolitical changes, new geo-economic configurations, and socio-environmental transformations.

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